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ABSTRACT

The recent resurgence of judging teacher effectiveness is part of a revival of behavioristic attempts to find universal criteria empirically as the identification of the "good teacher" or "good teaching." Defenders of behaviorist psychology argue that any "educational objectives" which cannot be quantified are not "real educational objectives." Lifelong concerns cannot be perceived as objectives but as continuous processes; thus the need for their quantification becomes a near-impossibility and unnecessary enterprise. In contrast to the current model of the American teacher as boss, lecturer, intrusive conditioner, and reinforcer, under existential education thought, the teacher would be the receptive, Taoist helper in the teacher-pupil relationship, trying to provide harmony to the conflict "the Self" encounters in his human existential predicament. As long as the three orientations of logical positivism, operationalism and pragmatism continue to influence educational thought, then education has no choice but to look toward the behavioral sciences. Now, according to existentialist thought, the behavioral sciences do have an opportunity to unify subjective with objective knowledge and thus assist education in developing more profound understanding of the relation of the individual to the group. (Author/KSM)

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Must We Employ Behavioristic Theory To Have Students Evaluate Us As Teachers?

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(A paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Virginia Social Sciences Association, Blacksburg, Virginia, April 27 - 28, 1973.)

The recent resurgence of judging teacher effectiveness has emerged, in part, from the now subsided student unrest and the continued demands by students for relevant learning. In particular, the works of N. A. Flanders, A. A. Bellack, D. G. Ryans, N. L. Gage, and W. J. McKeachie, among others in the fifties and sixties had added to a revival of behavioristic attempts to find universal criteria empirically in the identification of the "good teacher" or "good teaching."[1] Ironically, this revival comes when data about the effectiveness of various teaching methods indicate rather strongly that "no particular method of college teaching [at least] is measurably to be preferred over another."[2]

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Within this neo-behavioristic revival, a change from the comparison of student outcomes on an achievement variable, usually scores on selected standardized tests, has shifted to some form of student opinion poll about teachers and their courses as the alternate criterion. Despite all that has been said under the guise as well as disguise of their brand of "science" and "empiricism," the neo-behaviorists seem to have provided very little pedagogical illumination in defining for us the "good teacher" or good "teaching," both in higher as well as

public education. Nothing, in addition, seems to have emerged from Anderson and Ramkas' bold proposal of 1963, in this instance these authors themselves failing to continue their research along the lines of their own proposal.[3] Why, then, this continued sad state-of-affairs in pedagogical research?

With the revival of behaviorism since the middle fifties and with an added impetus given to the movement by these neo-behaviorists, especially Skinner, the emphasis on statistical method in educational research far overshadows the substantivity of its findings in supposedly defining "scientifically" excellence in pedagogy. Sadly, this search has gone on, according to both Barr and Popham, with no substantive advancement toward understanding the "what" in teaching for at least fifty years!

What explanations can be attributed to this conclusive exercise in futility? Perhaps the neo-behaviorists need a new "frame of reference." Offhand the neo-behaviorists seem to be obsessed with statistical methodology, including its applications to computer capability. To deprive the hard, empirical statistically-oriented neo-behaviorists of their a priori "educational objectives" and with it their continual delight for statistical quantification for all forms of human behavior would certainly sentence them to a scholastic wasteland--and thus perhaps deny for them their own forms of self-actualization, a matter the neo-behaviorists would find difficult to concede under existentialist educational theory.

Rating questionnaires, both student and administrator, are the neo-behaviorists' favorite "instrumentation" through which they claim they can "scientifically" determine one's teaching capability. However, rating questionnaires are always based on a set of *a priori* criteria despite the neo-behaviorists' position that their "empiricism" had made one set of criteria more reliable and valid than another. The rating questionnaire, no matter how it is contrived, fails to take into adequate account both human individuality as well as human unpredictability. Many such pitfalls exist as, for example, "were the instructor's course objectives clear?" On a five point scale, what constituted four or five units of clearness for an individual instructor? How fair was "below average fair"? How much willingness to admit to error by the instructor was "superior willingness?"[4]

In addition to this human frailty with the rating questionnaire, the neo-behaviorists often overlooked the simple distinction between *measurement* (or *grading*) and *evaluation*. Kossoff provided this simple analogy: if one had a basketful of eggs, he could grade them easily depending which criterion for grading he decided to choose--weight, size or color. However, none of these methods told one which egg he wanted for breakfast. Only after one ate the egg could he so determine. In these senses, an *evaluation* thus became an *appraisal*; a *measurement*, a *quantification*. Any determination of teacher effectiveness based on *a priori* criteria, therefore, yielded a quantification and not an appraisal.

With their overconcern for quantification, the neo-behaviorists overlooked another attribute of teaching, this time teaching as a process. As such, teaching per se was neither too dependent on any given philosophy nor any given psychology, but was highly ordered as symbolism through language. "Both pragmatic thought and behavioristic psychology," remarked Bellack, "emphasize that learning takes place through activity. This view is popularized in the expression that one learns to do by doing. The import of this view is to deprecate the use of language in teaching. ... This view is held in spite of the fact that it is difficult, if not impossible, to teach one anything without the use of language."

Admitted that behavioristic psychology has made major contributions--and will continue to do so-- to such acts in pedagogy as the three R's, in special education, in physical education, and in driver education, among others, but can the neo-behaviorists provide me, as a learner, with a program of studies, or even a three hour credit course, including their own behavioristic "educational objectives" properly operationalized, which would teach me how to lead the "good life"--indeed a most pragmatic question for me? Or say, teach me something about my dread toward death? Or about my ability "to have reason"? The obvious answers to these rather life-like, complex questions have to be a resounding "no." However, when confronted with such an attack, the neo-behaviorists either ignore the question or merely remark that since such "educational objectives" cannot be quantified, they are thus "pseudo" and therefore are not "real educational objectives."

Despite all this, the neo-behaviorists will not abandon their elusive pursuit. As late as 1972, Gage continued to ask: can "science" contribute to the "art of teaching"? This question, he held, is being answered more and more positively (despite the preceding fifty or more years of futility) and this educational "science" is now "reaching solid ground" by no longer stressing the search for the universal and the macroscopic, but the specific and the microscopic.[5] Research in the specific and the microscopic in modifying teaching behavior should yield no more than another plethora of fragmented, empirical frivolity--as fifty years or so of previous research on the universal and the macroscopic.

So with more than fifty years of "empirical research," including the sustained, but disappointing efforts of the neo-behaviorists, would it be reasonable to expect modifications in teaching along the research routes proposed by the noe-behaviorists will dramatically affect teaching? Probably not--simply because when coupled with the enormous inputs, both biological and cultural, including the educational, into the lives of our students, more than fifty years of research on teaching should by now have provided the educational establishment, especially its neo-behavioristic adherents, with two categorical answers, namely: (1) modifications of the current known teaching styles <u>will not</u> dramatically affect current learning (2) no further research on teaching.[6] Despite all this, the neo-behaviorists' shift from the universal and the macroscopic to the specific and microscopic seems not justified by fifty to seventy-five years of previous futile research but rather

symptomizes a continued obsession for the quantification of teaching behavior, no matter how inconsequential the results produced by the neo-behaviorists' questionably selected variables as well as educational settings.

Furthermore, when the statistical methods of prediction, the ultimate in science's attempts at description, explanation, and prediction, especially through multiple linear regression analysis are applied, the neo-behaviorists call on little of the past other than the immediate past as well as the present as their bases for their antecedent assumptions rather than any form of the long historical tradition. In other words, the future in experience for the neo-behaviorists is predicated upon theimmediacy of the present or immediate past experience.

The approved methodologies of the behavioral sciences, moreover, do not lend themselves to the systematic study of human values and human judgments and the learner thus receives no such training within the behaviorial sciences. The behavioral as well as the other so-called "true sciences" try to support the common illusion that they all are "value-free", which, of course, is not the case. Moreover, science is often called upon to render judgments that require far more knowledge of the past than the up-to-date scientists, including the behavioral, usually possess.[7] In short, through the neo-behavioristic methodologies man cannot obtain answers to questions involving human value, human judgment, and the durable historical heritage.

One more piece of non-empirical, but rational thinking for the neo-behaviorists before a recommendation to them for a probable change in their most current "frame of reference" -- the specific and the microscopic. The neo-behaviorists' own behaviorism does not give them license to choose among several alternative behavioral specifications whenever there is more than one alternative to specify--and even more so, to operationalize--an educational behavioral objective. Of equal, if not greater importance--even if such alternatives did exist--the neo-behaviorists cannot completely justify their selection of an educational objective stated in quantifiable (operationalized) behavioristic terms as contrasted to the selection by others of an educational objective stated in non-behavioristic terms. This decision must represent a choice other than the application of the neo-behaviorists' own behaviorism, since the alternative not to do so also exists through the simplest in logical reasoning.

Since all behavioristic theory rests on statistical quantification--hence the neo-bheaviorists' assertion of their being "scientific" or "empirical," which is not the case. Frequently the decision to quantify or to not quantify an educational objective seems to rest on a somewhat silly notion, namely, through defining an educational objective into quantifiable behavioristic terms through the introduction of an activity verb. For example, the non-behavioristically stated "to have the pupil understand modern poetry" as an educational objective altered to the behavioristically-stated "to have the pupil write a critical essay on modern poetry,"--thus leading to some kind of grading or measurement--

does not in and of itself clinch the ultimate wisdom of the neo-behaviorists' decision. In other words, neo-behaviorism by itself does not provide sufficient cause for the selection of behavioristic over non-behavioristic educational objectives.[8]

Most neo-behavioristic tactics interfere with the learner's self-actualization. In this respect, Etzioni observed that "what is becoming increasingly apparent is that to solve social problems by changing people is more expensive and usually less productive than approaches that accept people as they are and seek not to mend them but the circumstances around them."[9] Yet, even here, the problems of individual man is far more primary to individual qua individual man than the problems of his society to him, despite the utterances of Skinner, among others, to the contrary. Individual man has, because of the existentialist absurdity of his existence, to cope with the perennial problems of life itself, especially about the inevitability of his own death, the joy as well as the agony of his love, the reality of choice through his won free will, the experience of his own freedom in a democracy or a totalitarian state, and the fruitfulness or futility of his own interpersonal relationships with others. In other words, individual man, as a learner, must come into encounter with his own human predicament.[10]

No neo-behavioristically contrived "educational objectives" can cope with such rather high order, complex and highly individualized life-long concerns which, moreover, cannot be perceived as "objectives"--ultimate, educational or otherwise, but must be conceived as continuous processes. Thus, as processes, these concerns do not represent final

objectives, purposes or missions--rather they are "the stuff of life" and hence more real than success at a vocation or being able to read and to write in a highly industrialized and technologically-orineted society. Therefore, the need for their quantification or their "operational definition" becomes a near-impossibility, if not an unnecessary enterprise.

What, then, becomes the primary relationship between teacher and pupil? The current model of the American teacher seems to be that of the boss and the lecturer as well as the intrusive conditioner and reinforcer--the last alluding to the primary concerns of the neo-behaviorists, namely "operant conditioning" or "behavior modification." In contrast, under existentialist educational thought the teacher would be the receptive, Taoist helper in the teacher-pupil relationship--not necessarily alwasy the pragmatic teacher, but the teacher capable of spontaneous as well as unselfish actions, constantly trying to provide harmony to the conflict the Self encounters in his human existential predicament. In the words of Maslow:

> This doctrine of the Real Self to be uncovered and actualized is also a total rejection of the tabula rosa notions of the behaviorists and associationists, who often talk as if anything can be learned or as if anything can be taught, and as if the human being is a sort of passive clay to be shaped, controlled, reinforced in any way that the teacher arbitrarily decided.[11]

Under these conditions, should a neo-behavioristically-contrived rating form be employed in evaluating teacher performance? A categorical "no!" seems to be the best likely answer. "What would one substitute in its place?" some would ask. "No substitution would be necessary,"

could be one form of reply. "But teachers must be evaluated, especially under the latest concept of 'teacher accountability' or 'performance contracting'," could be the rejoinder. But according to one Office of Educational Opportunity report, neither the concept of "teacher accountability" nor "performance contracting" as behavioristic methods of evaluation seemed to be the answer.[12]

During the 1970-71 school year the Office of Economic Opportunity with an authorization of $7.2 million for the project decided to conduct a major study on performance contracting. Instead of relying on standard teachers and their standard teaching routines, a community signed a contract with outside specialists. This outside firm would be paid only if it improved the students' learning. Some thirty cities experimented with performance contracting heavily subsidized by the OEO.

Six educational firms, eighteen school districts, both city and rural, and 13,000 children in grades one to three and seven to nine, comprised the year-long experiment. The final results of this $7.2 million "experiment" to determine the validity of another "experiment", namely, performance contracting: a failure. According to the OEO survey, both the special classrooms--the experimental groups--as well as in the ordinary classes--the control groups--failed to reach the standards expected in terms of national norms. In other words, two forms of behavioristic methodology, the experimental or the "new" as well as the control or the "traditional" failed to achieve the anticipated results.

Sufficient argument has been presented to cast the dominance of behavioristic-thinking in pedagogy to the winds. What, then, should be the altered "frame of reference"?

Existential educational theory would seem to be the answer. Such a new "frame of reference" would not only allow for the highest form of individualization of instruction but also eliminate the totally behavioristically-oriented rating questionnaire as the primary means in teacher evaluation. Why? At least four explanations can be given. First, at least since John Dewey's influence, education has depended heavily both philosophically as well as "realistically" on pragmatism. Pragmatism, in turn, has drawn most of its basic tenets from the behavioral sciences, particularly psychology.[13] Second, problems in education have lacked a rigorous experimental approach in research methodology and thus much educational research has made use of ex post facto conditions.[14] Third, whenever the pragmatic concept of individual differences among learners has been applied on an experimental basis, the cataloguing of the findings has resulted in accepted social and psychological norms. In turn, this has produced educational programs which have focused on inquiry, consensus, and process rather than on the individual, authentic freedom of the learner himself. Thus, this experimentalistic-pragmatic approach to education has failed to sensitize the learner to his own sense of freedom.[15] Finally, because the behavioral sciences seem to have been overly concerned with externally placed guides on behavior, education itself has given little attention to the organismic states of the individual learner, and, as a result, the behavioristic has been emphasized in the subject material to be taught as well as in teaching materials at the expense of the learner's physiological needs.[16]

There, furthermore, seems to be turning away from an orientation in education which leads the learner to feel, as a result of his total

educational experience, that he is no more than an object about whom conclusions have been already reached. Whenever teachers focus mostly on too much empiricism and behavioristic statistical data derived from group norms, this easily can be the result.

As long as the three orientations of logical postivism, operationalism, and pragmatism continue to influence educational thought--the latter two most heavily--then education has no choice but to look toward the behavioral sciences. If all else remains to choose between the three, pragmatism would be particularly yet valid for the behavioral sciences for it allowed for the testing of hypotheses that lead to substantive theory.

Until existential thought, however, began to threaten pragmatic thought during the sixties, the latter had almost near monopoly on American educational practices and research from about 1900 to 1960. Thus, despite the continued necessity for a pragmatic orientation, the behavioral sciences have yet to distinguish clearly between meaningful and meaningless concepts as well as concepts corresponding to real experience, on the one hand, and purely verbal definitions on the other.[17] Now, according to existentialist thought, the behavioral sciences do have an opportunity to unify subjective with objective knowledge and thus assist education in developing a more profound understanding of the relation of the individual to the group.[18] And a rationale, although not necessarily totally empirical means to assess teacher effectiveness remains such a challenge, if existentialist thought, will be allowed to penetrate hard core new-behaviorism.

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2. R. Dubin and T. C. Taveggia. The Teaching-Learning Paradox. Eugene, Oregon: University of Oregon, 1968.

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4. E. Kossoff, "Evaluating College Professors by Scientific Methods," American Scholar, Winter 1971-72, p. 80.

5. Gage, op. cit., passim.

6. The Editors, "Teacher Effectiveness and Teacher Education: The Search for a Scientific Basis," Harvard Educational Review 42:2 (May, 1972), pp. 282-287.

7. H. J. Muller, "Education for the Future," American Scholar 41:3 (Summer, 1972), 377-388, passim.

8. I. S. Steinberg, "Behavioral Definition of Educational Objectives" In Philosophical Redirection of Educational Research, Seventy-First Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part I. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972, p. 160.

9. A. Etzioni, "Human Beings Are Not Very Easy to Change After All," Saturday Review, June 3, 1972, pp. 45-47.

10. G. F. Kneller. Introduction to the Philosophy of Education. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964, passim.

11. A. H. Maslow, "Some Educational Implications of the Humanistic Psychologies," Harvard Educational Review 38:4 (Fall, 1968), pp. 685-696, passim.

12. "Result of a Test: F," Time, February 14, 1972.

13. G. F. Kneller, Existentialism and Education (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1958), pp. 68-69.

14. F. N. Kerlinger, Foundations of Behavioral Research (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p. 373

15. Kneller, op. cit., p. 36.

16. E. R. Hilgard, ed., "Theories of Learning and Instruction," Sixty-Third Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 29.

17. G. J. DiRenzo, ed., Concepts, Theory and Explanation in the Behavioral Sciences (New York: Random House, 1966), pp. 12-13.

18. Kneller, op. cit., p. 130.